

DNR Director Designate Rodney Stokes
TALKING POINTS – House Committee on Natural Resources, Tourism and
Outdoor Recreation
House Office Building, Room 307
9 a.m. Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2011

- Chairman Foster and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about something that many, many Michigan citizens feel very passionately about – our abundant and amazing natural resources.
- I am Rodney Stokes, the director designate for the DNR. I would like to take a couple of minutes to tell you a little bit about my background. (RODNEY WILL ADD)
- As you know, Governor Snyder has issued an executive order to split the Department of Natural Resources and Environment into the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Environmental Quality.
- These two agencies, along with the Department of Agriculture—soon to be the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development—form the Quality of Life executive group.
- Under this model, I will work closely with DEQ Director Wyant and Ag's Director Keith Creagh, allowing us to share perspectives on overlapping topics—yet focus on our agency's individual issues.
- Now, I would like to get in to some important information for you about the DNR.

- I have a workforce of 1,178 fulltime employees who are very dedicated to the management, protection and conservation of Michigan's natural resources.
- Our employees care very much about providing a high-quality outdoor recreation experience for the many Michigan citizens and visitors who enjoy what we have to offer.
- Once the agency is split, our Fiscal Year 2011 budget will be roughly \$323 million – 70.7% is restricted funds, 24.3% is federal funding and 4.9 percent is General Fund. (Source: Sharon Schafer)
- Michigan is very blessed with great hunting and fishing, a state park system that encompasses many of the things that make Michigan special, and a state forest system that provides not only recreational opportunities, but thousands of jobs in the forest products industry.
- To give you perspective about what we manage and take care of in Michigan, let me give you some numbers:
 - At 3.9 million acres, we manage the largest dedicated state forest system in the country.
 - We are a national leader in rails-to-trails, and we offer more than 6,200 miles of groomed snowmobile trails.
 - We have 138 state forest campgrounds, offering sites for just \$15 a night to folks who want the experience of just pitching a tent near the woods and water.

- Our state forest system supports more than 136,000 jobs in the forest products industry, contributing \$14 billion a year to our economy. (Source: Michigan Forest Products Council 2010 annual report)
- Michigan has more than 36,000 miles of rivers and streams, including more than 1,000 miles of blue ribbon trout streams.
- In Michigan, you are never more than **six miles** from great fishing. (Source: DNR Fisheries)
- We have more than 2 million licensed anglers who enjoy that great fishing every year. (This is an average for last several years)
- Anglers in Michigan spend \$2 billion annually, generating \$225 million in tax revenue and support 19,500 jobs in small businesses in our state. (Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation)
- The DNR operates six state fish hatcheries, producing more than 700,000 pounds of fish every year. Forty percent of all recreational fishing depends on these stocked fish, including 70 percent of all the Great Lakes trout and salmon fishery. (Source: DNR Fisheries)
- Michigan's two peninsulas provide 8 million acres of public hunting land, including 4.5 million acres managed by the DNR.

- There are another 2.2 million acres of privately owned forest land in northern Michigan enrolled in the Commercial Forest Act, which lowers taxes for those property owners in exchange for public access to the land for hunting and other forms of recreation.
- We lease several thousand acres of farm land in the Southern Michigan to provide access to hunters.
- We manage and protect more than 400 species of animals, including our game and non-game species.
- Hunting activity in our state represents a \$1.3 billion economic impact, supporting many small businesses and generating \$153 million in state tax revenue. (Source: Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation report)
- We have 98 state parks and recreation areas that welcome more than 22 million visitors a year, including more than 4 million campers. State park visitors contribute more than \$650 million to the state's economy each year. (Source: Recreation Division)
- The DNR maintains or sponsors more than 80 boat harbors on the Great Lakes, including, Chairman Foster, in your district -- Straits State Harbor, the greenest boat harbor on the Great Lakes.
- We also operate more than 750 boating access sites giving the public water access all over the state.
- I think you get the idea that we have a lot to manage and take care of at the DNR.

- All of those things contribute to Michigan's economy.
- The priorities of the DNR revolve around four basic principles:
- First, we will put a renewed emphasis on providing top-notch customer service everywhere – over the license sales counter, in the field, at a park or anytime we have contact with the public.
- Second, we will continue to find ways to broaden the base of support for outdoor recreation by continuously promoting the new Recreation Passport.
- When renewing your license plate each year, you have the option of paying \$10 for this new passport, which will support our state parks, state forest recreation, historic and cultural sites in state parks and a grant program for parks in your communities.
- Third, we must work harder to increase participation in outdoor recreation in our state, and reverse the trend of declining participation in hunting and fishing; and
- Fourth, we will foster the growth of Michigan's resource-based economy.
- I plan on addressing these areas in the following ways:
- We will look for ways to diversify and broaden hunting opportunities in our state, such as the recently announced Pheasant Restoration Initiative.

- This effort is a great partnership between state and federal agencies and conservation groups to restore this game bird, which was once king in our state.
- We will continue to expand our efforts to get youth more involved in hunting and fishing. This is an imperative if we are going to have future leaders in natural resources management and conservation.
- We will bolster our efforts to attract non-traditional users to the outdoors. We have a strong effort in the Saginaw-Bay City area targeted at urban outreach and faith-based organizations.
- We also have made great inroads with The Salvation Army in Detroit, and getting urban youth into our Pocket Park to learn basic outdoor skills, like fishing.
- We also are planning to expand the William G. Milliken State Park in downtown Detroit. The department was recommended for Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grants in December to expand the park and rehab a blighted building into an indoor-outdoor adventure center for the park.
- I want to continue these efforts and expand upon them to other areas of the state, whether it is getting corporations to hold company picnics at our state parks or involving churches in Free Fishing Weekends, we want them as our customers.
- We will put a greater emphasis on building lifelong customers – people who enjoy the outdoors throughout their lives.

- We are recognized as a national leader in providing access to the outdoors for people who have disabilities. This effort will extend to planning for our customers as they age so they can continue having access to the activities they love.
- Many conservation organizations put an emphasis on getting children outdoors, and we will continue our efforts there as well. **However, I also want to put an emphasis on getting adults outdoors.**
- Our research shows that our biggest group of lapsed anglers is in the 30-45 year old age bracket. Research also shows that if mom is outdoors hunting, fishing or camping, the children will follow.
- We will put an emphasis on outdoor recreation as an activity that families can share in, and offer more programs geared toward **Becoming an Outdoor Family.**
- We are in the midst of coming up with new marketing programs for state parks, with the Recreation Passport. Many of our citizens have the impression that state parks are just for camping.
- Our state parks and recreation areas offer much more than just camping. They are safe, clean places to enjoy nature, whether it is a walk in the woods or a day at the beach. The people of this state own some of Michigan's most scenic places in our state parks and recreation areas.
- We have taken conservation education to a new level in our state, offering a wide variety of programs for children and families.

- Our Natural Resources Academy offers low-cost training for teachers who want to incorporate conservation education in their classrooms, and we are reaching more and more teachers from urban school districts through this effort.
- Our natural resources are important to our state's economy. They are important to small businesses that are tied to our tourism economy.
- For example, in some areas of the state, the two weeks of firearm deer season generates more than 10 percent of the economic activity for the area – it is their version of holiday shopping's "Black Friday."
- The DNR must do a better job of fostering sustainable growth of the resource-based industries, like mining, forestry, and oil and gas.
- We must grow hunting and fishing activities, not only because it is what our traditional stakeholders demand, but because it is good for Michigan's economy.
- We must ensure that we are contributing to the quality of life that Michigan residents want and deserve, through providing recreational opportunities that meet the changing demands of citizens.
- Managing those natural resources falls to my department, but the wise use and enjoyment of our natural resources involves many Michigan citizens, including many of your constituents.
- I look forward to working with you, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.